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## J.F. ROWNY CHAIRS OF COMPARATIVE RELIGIONS

### AND RELIGION AND SOCIETY

The delivery of an inaugural lecture by Wade Clark Roof on May 30, 1990 gives us the occasion to print up the three inaugurals delivered by Emeritus Professor Robert Michaelson, first occupant of the J.F. Rowny Chair of Religion and Society, Ninian Smart, occupant of the J.F. Rowny Chair of Comparative Religions, and Professor Roof. We are producing these as separate booklets. I hope that they will give a sense of the variety of work in the Department of Religious Studies. It is appropriate to mention that the chief work in establishing these chairs was done by our colleague, Professor Phillip Hammond. We are grateful to the memory of J.F. Rowny, whose interest in world religions has borne fruit not just in the endowment of these chairs but also in much help to graduate students. Partly in consequence, we have a very strong graduate program at the University of California, Santa Barbara. We also should express our gratitude to the Interdisciplinary Humanities Center at UCSB, under the benign and scholarly leadership of Professor Paul Hernadi, which has sponsored these lectures during the academic years of 1988-89 and 1989-90. It is also a pleasure to acknowledge the fine support we have had from the Chancellor, Barbara Uehling, Vice-Chancellor Gordon Hammes, and the Provost of the College of Letters and Science, David Sprecher. I would like also to thank Kimberly Labor for her work in preparing the lectures for publication.

*Ninian Smart,  
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## Note

I am grateful beyond words to my colleagues for electing me into the J.F. Rowny Chair of Comparative Religions. It is a singular honor since we jointly help to constitute, with our students and our fine staff, maybe the best department of its kind west of the Mississippi, and well-known east of it as well. I am grateful to Phillip Hammond especially for his work in helping to create the Rowny chairs. I salute my brother recipient, Robert Michaelsen, a fine colleague, from the banks of the Mississippi itself, who has done much to promote the cause of the modern study of religion in the United States.

The modern study of religion is one of the great intellectual developments of the recent past. But many academics do not yet understand that we have moved far beyond what used to be called theology, that is, Christian theology, and the kind of enterprise typical of seminaries and divinity schools. Our aim in the comparative or cross-cultural study of religion is to explore religion and religions as a force in human affairs, at varying times and places, weak and strong. It is the power of religion, rather than its truth, that primarily concerns us. The Ayatollah was what he was independently of the value which we in the West might place upon his theology and actions. Now this attempt to appraise the dimensions of religion in terms of their power to influence other aspects of human existence and in terms of the ways they are affected by those other aspects is, of course, highly relevant to both the humanities and social sciences—what I here shall for short dub the human sciences. I shall spell out some of the connections later.

I take a somewhat functional approach to religion and like to deal with it in relation to seven dimensions through which religions manifest themselves, namely the ritual, ethical, doctrinal, narrative, experiential, social, and material dimensions. Religions typically have practices or rituals, ethical and legal precepts, doctrines or philosophies, narratives or myths, experiences and emotions, seminal and social or organizational arrangements, and material or artistic products. It is not that this scheme of mine is sacrosanct: there are others that would work. But it is an attempt to ensure that by treating all these dimensions we will give a rounded and realistic view of how a religion functions. If we were thinking of Scottish Presbyterianism we would note the style of worship, preaching, sabbath-keeping and family involvement; we would depict the ethics of inner-worldly asceticism; we would note the teachings of Calvin and how they have been adapted to the Scottish scene; we would see the narratives of the Bible and the Reformation as normative; we would depict and evoke some of the sober feelings and the sense of election typical of Presbyterian life in Scotland; we would observe the religious establishment and the social embedding of the Kirk in Scottish life; we would look at the generally plain churches and generally aniconic mode of Calvinist representations. The exploration of the role of the Kirk would obviously be vital to an understanding of Scottish life.

But it is fairly obvious that this functional approach could also apply to quite a few manifestations of secular ideology. For instance, East German Marxism had its rituals—parades, flags, the use of revolutionary language; it had its doctrines—Marxism-Leninism of a particular kind; it had narratives—the history of the revolution, the prerevolutionary struggle against the Nazis, etc.; it had its ethics—an adherence to revolutionary ideals and proletarian values, etc.; it had its emotional side, enhanced by songs and music; it had its social organization—the East German Com-



munist Party; it had its material embodiment—the architecture of the Stalinallee, socialist-realism in painting, etc. For these reasons I prefer to extend our studies to the study of worldviews in general and not just to religions. For practical purposes the comparative study of religions is the comparative study of worldviews. There are some interesting consequences: for instance we would consider the relations between the party and the state in Marxist countries as a special case of church-state relations. The heirs of Lutheran establishmentarianism were the Marxist regimes of Eastern Europe and such regimes as the Chinese.

I have laid some emphasis on social organizations. Of course in today's world there are lots of floating individuals—practical humanists or eclectic searchers with a more spiritual emphasis. These, too, are a vital phenomenon of the modern world, and though unorganized, they have an important social presence. Many such searchers and humanists are found among our students.

Obviously our exploration of religions and worldviews must be cross-cultural. There is no excuse for Western tribalism, though it is prevalent. In any case, the West's chief religion, Christianity, has moved south. Its center of gravity is no longer in the North. Its most populous regions are Africa and Latin America. I do not wish to decry the emphasis on European and American culture which prevails in our schools, but it must surely be heavily supplemented by Chinese, African, Islamic, and many other strands. Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism—these and many other great traditions need to be part of our explorations, and this is why we in religious studies put a heavy emphasis upon world studies. We can thereby supplement much that goes on in the academy: not just Western studies of various kinds, but Asian and Asian-American studies, Chicano studies, African and African-American studies, Native American studies, Middle Eastern studies, and so forth. I would like for us, perhaps through the Interdisciplinary Humanities Center here, to promote a study and inventory of worldviews prevalent among the Pacific Rim nations: Japanese, Korean, and Chinese values; the particularities of Indonesian Islam and the ideology of the present political system; the Pacific Way in Oceania; Australian and New Zealand values, including Aboriginal and Maori ideas; the Westward-facing Hispanic States and their values; the ideology of California and of western Canada and Alaska; the attitudes of the Soviet Union; and the worldviews of the Inuit and their Soviet relatives.

Because the exploration of religion is cross-cultural, we put a lot of emphasis on methods of imagination and fieldwork as well as on the more traditional dealing with texts. We have to be ancient and modern. To understand ancient times you need time travel, and for many studies you need a kind of space travel. We have to think ourselves into other thought worlds. Data are vital, of course, but imagination or empathy are also. Religious studies has its analogues in anthropology. For many purposes

we are the same discipline. Geertz works in religious studies, as does Mary Douglas (she is currently visiting professor in religious studies at Lancaster University); and other scholars such as Jack Hawley and Mark Juergensmeyer do a kind of anthropology. I think informed empathy is a central ingredient of the humanities. How does a boy feel what it is like to be a girl, or a White grasp the important values of Native American life, or a Vietnamese understand Europe, or an African-American imagine what African existence was like in the Gambia or Angola? In all cases we need to cultivate the imagination.

This is an area where literature can play a vital part. I like to introduce students to Eastern Orthodox Christianity through *The Brothers Karamazov*, to the Hindu tradition through *A Passage to India* and Narayan's *The Guide*, and to nineteenth-century Catholicism in Italy through *The Saint* by Fogazzaro. You can all think of many variants. Literature is great enhancer of informed empathy. Scriptural texts also can have a like effect: the poems of the *Thera-* and *Therigatha*, the numinous theophany in the *Gita*, *Job*, the *Platform Sutra*—to name but a few. Of course, in terms of my informed empathy we need much more than literary texts. For the non-Jew *Leviticus* may seem dry stuff, but we need to enter the world of the Jewish student and observer of Torah. (Incidentally, one of the least understood religions in the West is Judaism, since people brought up as Christians think—wrongly, of course—that they know what it is. This makes a current tendency to inwardness in Jewish studies—Judaism studies by and for Jews—a bit unfortunate. Happily, here at UCSB we have a broad and outward-looking approach to Jewish studies, largely because of the pioneering work here of my colleague Richard Hecht, recently supplemented by two new colleagues, Randall Garr and Barbara Holdrege.)

In any event, informed empathy is nothing special to religious studies but is vital throughout the human sciences. And already because of it, we see affinities between the exploration of religion and the comparative study of literature. Another bond lies in the necessary concerns with hermeneutics, or theory of the interpretation of texts, where we have many fascinating examples in the religious sphere of modes in which the evolution of the varying dimensions of religion has affected the hermeneutical practice of a faith or worldview. One of the most striking puzzles comes out of India: how is it that the same Upanishadic texts were interpreted by Sankara, Ramanuja, and Madhva (to name but three) in such a diverse manner, ranging from full-blooded monism to strict dualism? One becomes suspicious: perhaps the texts, vital as they are, came to be outweighed by diverse conceptions of piety and practice.

There also arises in my mind the question of whether literature departments, if they have canons, are not branches of a worldview, with professors as mullahs, high critics as ayatollahs, and students as the faithful? You will, of course, excuse the speculation. We tend to see



religious structures everywhere.

It is, of course, fairly evident that the multidimensional character of worldviews means that the means to explore them will be multidisciplinary. In addition, the fact that religions are both ancient and modern underlines the need for historical perspectives, often thought to be primary. The social dimension means that we need sociology and anthropology, the narrative dimension points to literary methods, the doctrinal dimension overlaps with the history of philosophy and intellectual history, the ethical and legal dimension has relations to law, experiential aspects of religion relate to psychology, and ritual studies can be important in anthropology. Material products are part of the subject matter of art history and the history of architecture.

So we import a great deal from the various disciplines I have listed and from others. Our work is enriched by such figures as Weber, Geertz, Levi-Strauss, Victor Turner, Hirsch, Gadamer, Foucault, Rodo, Beteille, Narayan, MacIntyre, Jung, James, Mary Douglas, J.L. Austin, Gombrich, and Kramrisch.

What does the study of religions and worldviews have for export? First, it has the ineluctable cross-cultural perspective. This is vital to us here in California and is relevant in most of the rest of the world. Our citizens are Christians of various kinds, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, New Agers, and a whole variety of other movements. They come from Iowa, Vietnam, Africa, Nicaragua, Mexico, Native American enclaves, China, Korea, Japan, Laos, Texas, and a host of other milieux. It behooves us to be cross-cultural throughout the human sciences. We in the Department have experimented with seminars and other help for high school teachers to teach some material on world religions through their cultural manifestations in California, a program known as Religious Contours of California. I shall return to this question of the cross-cultural perspective in talking about philosophy.

Second, in relation to sociology, there is a great increase in interest in world-systems theory and the like. The global way of looking at human life is important, and religious studies can supply both data and theory relevant to this. For instance, the varying reactions of religious traditions conceived as cultural forces during and after the colonial period are very important for the process of modernization in countries such as India, China, and Japan. It is important, too, retroflexively in the USA. One can speculate as to what difference it makes when the modernizing forces are internal to the imperial power rather than external. I would hold that some of the same reactions occur. Liberal Protestantism has affinities with the modern Hindu ideology of Vivekananda and Gandhi, while various neofoundationalist (or fundamentalist) responses sacrifice a slice of science in what is otherwise a modernization of Christian ritual and other dimensions.

Third, the establishment of departments of religious studies

Tenth, let me underline a point which I made near the beginning. We in religious studies have the honor to complement many area studies. The exploration of the worldviews of China, Korea, and Japan contributes to East Asian studies; of South Asian religions to South Asian studies; of Christianity and Judaism to classical and medieval studies; of modern Christianities and other religions to modern American studies; of pre-Columbian religion and Hispanic Catholicism to Chicano studies; of African and African-American religions to Black studies; of Eastern orthodoxy to Soviet studies; of Pacific religions to Pacific Rim studies; and so on.

Let me now, having sketched these exports of religious studies, say a few words to a number of significant people. To the chancellor I affirm this:

*Note that modern religious studies, with its imaginative empathy and cross-cultural scope, has a key role to play in the education of the young who are entering a plural world.*

To the director of the Interdisciplinary Humanities Center I say:

*We are enthusiastic about the interdisciplinary enterprise, for that is our substance, and remember that we can help you to be cross-cultural: beyond the glories of the West lie those of the East and South.*

To historians and social scientists I say:

*We can let you hear more clearly the sound of symbols.*

To the atheists I say:

*The exploration of the power of worldviews is compatible with everything you stand for, and everything which you oppose.*

To the pious I say:

*It is your decision to be pious: our task is analysis and synthesis. You are part of what we have the privilege of understanding.*



To the world I say:

*Forget your reactions to religion, and heed the importance of a cross-cultural pluralism: as we shrink into a single, interconnected global society, so our devotion to delineating the riches and tragedies of religion and of various human worldviews becomes all the more relevant to the preparation of globally oriented citizens.*

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